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Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SNM-05 DEAE-00 TRSE-00 HA-05
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 5048

FOL TEL SENT ACTION PRIORITY BANGKOK INFO PRIORITY VIENTIANE
FROM UDORN DATED FEB 17, 1978 REPEATED TO YOU

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L UDORN 0038

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SNAR SREF LA TH
SUBJECT: INTERVIEW WITH FORMER LPDR DRUG OFFICIAL

REF: A) VIENTIANE 0206 B) BANGKOK 4570

1. CONREP LOCATED AND INTERVIEWED FORMER LPDR DRUG OFFICIAL DR CHOM CHANH, AT NONG KHAI PROVINCE ISOC DETENTION CENTER FEBRUARY 16. DR CHOM TOLD CONREP THAT HE FLED FROM VIENTIANE TO SRI CHIANG MAI DISTRICT, NONG KHAI PROVINCE, JANUARY 29, BRINGING WITH HIM HIS WIFE, FIVE CHILDREN AND AN UNCLE. HE STATED THAT AFTER SEVERAL DAYS IN DISTRICT JAIL HE AND HIS FAMILY WERE TRANSFERRED TO DETENTION CENTER FEBRUARY 3.

2. DR CHOM, WHO IMPRESSED CONREP AS BEING UNUSUALLY INTELLIGENT AND WELL EDUCATED (SEE BIO DETAILS PARA OSEVEN), STATED HIS DIRECTORSHIP OF USAID-FUNDED MENTAL AND DRUG REHABILITATION CENTER IN VIENTIANE ENDED
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WITH HIS ARREST BY LPDR AUTHORITIES JANUARY 2, 1976. HE STATED THAT HE WAS SENT IMMEDIATDLY TO BONG DOK SEMINAR CAMP FOR A MONTH, FOLLOWING WHICH HE WAS TRANSFERRED TO ANOTHER SEMINAR CAMP LOCATED ON MECHAI ISLAND NEAR THALAD DAM.

3. DR CHOM ADDED THAT HE SERVED FOR NINETEEN MONTHS

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IN THIS CAMP AS MEDIC TO SEMINAR MEMBERS ENGAGED IN FORCED LABOR. HE STATED THAT IN MID-OCTOBER 1977 HE WAS TAKEN BACK TO VIENTIANE TO TEACH PSYCHOLOGY TO PATHET LAO (SIC) DOCTORS. HE SAID THAT UPON LEARNING SECRETLY IN LATE JANUARY 1978 THAT HE WAS DESTINED TO BE SENT FEBRUARY 4 TO ANOTHER SEMINAR CAMP AT LONG TIENG, HE DECIDED TO FLEE TO THAILAND.

4. WITH REGARD TO FORMER USAID-SUPPORTED MENTAL AND DRUG REHABILITATION CENTER, DR CHOM TOLD CONREP THAT, ACCORDING TO HIS SOURCES, CENTER WAS CLOSED APRIL 8, 1976 AND INMATES TRANSFERRED TO NEW FACILITIES ON THAO AND NONG ISLANDS IN MEKONG RIVER NEAR NAM NGUM DAM.

5. IN RESPONSE TO QUERY WHETHER HE HAD ANY KNOWLEDGE OF OFFICIAL LPDR INVOLVEMENT IN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING, DR CHOM REPLIED IN NEGATIVE. HOWEVER, HE THEN MENTIONED TWO INCIDENTS WHICH SUGGESTED THE CONTRARY. FIRST, HE RECALLED THAT IN MARCH 1977 HE WAS SUMMONED FROM SEMINAR CAMP ON MECHAI ISLAND TO A MEETING IN OFFICE OF MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH, PRINCE SUH WANG-SAH. HE STATED THAT AT MEETING HE WAS QUERIED IF HE KNEW NAMES OF INDIVIDUALS IN LAOS WHO COULD PRODUCE HEROIN FROM OPIUM. HE SAID THAT HE REPLIED IN NEGATIVE.
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6. SECONDLY, DR CHOM RECALLED THAT SHORTLY BEFORE HE FLED TO THAILAND, SOME OF HIS FORMER SUBORDINATES IN VIENTIANE TOLD HIM THAT LPDR IS PERMITTING OPIUM GROWING IN LARGE AREA OF XIENG KHOUANG, PHONGSALY, LOUANG NAMTHA AN UDOMSAY PROVINCES. HIS SOURCES CLAIMED FURTHER THAT LPDR OFFICIALS ARE PURCHASING OPIUM FROM VILLAGERS IN THOSE PROVINCES.

7. BIO DETAILS: DR CHOM STATES THAT HE IS NATIVE OF VIENTIANE PROVINCE; FORTY YEARS OLD; 1967 MD GRADUATE FROM CANADA; 1972 GRADUATE, ADVANCED DEGREE IN PSYCHOLOGY AND NARCOTICS, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, USA; DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL, MEDICAL DEPARTMENT; MIN OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND DIRECTOR OF MENTAL AND DRUG REHABILITATION CENTER, VIENTIANE, 1972-1976.

8. COMMENT: IN VIEW OF DR CHOM'S REPORT THAT HE HAS SPENT MOST OF PERIOD SINCE DECEMBER 1975 ESTABLISHMENT OF LPDR IN SEMINAR CAMPS, IT DOES NOT APPEAR THAT HE IS IN A POSITION TO PROVIDE MUCH IF ANY STRATEGIC

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INTELLIGENCE REGARDING ALLEGED LPDR INVOLVEMENT IN NARCOTIC TRAFFICKING. HOWEVER, HE MAY BE ABLE TO OFFER SOME USEFUL BACKGROUND DETAILS REGARDING THIS ISSUE. UNLESS INSTRUCTED OTHERWISE, WE WILL RECOMMEND TO VICE CONSUL SHELDON'S TEMPORARY REPLACEMENT, WHO HAS BECOME FAMILIAR WITH LPDR DRUG MATTER, THAT UPON HIS RETURN TO UDORN EARLY NEXT WEEK HE ARRANGE FOR AN EXPERIENCED DEBRIEFER TO THOROUGHLY QUESTION DR CHOM.

9. WE INFORMED VISITING DEA PERSONNEL OF DR CHOM'S PRESENCE IN NONG KHAI BUT UNFORTUNATELY IT WAS JUST PRIOR TO THEIR RETURN TO BANGKOK.

10. DR CHOM'S COMMENTS IN PARAS 5 AND 6 MAY BE BASED
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MORE ON AN UNDERSTANDABLE DESIRE TO DISCREDIT LPDR REGIME RATHER THAN TRUTH. CONREP REPORTS THAT HE APPEARED TO BE EXHILARATED AT HIS NEW FOUND FREEDOM IN SPITE OF FACT THAT HE AND HIS FAMILY ARE BEING DETAINED IN A GROSSLY OVERCROWDED DETENTION CENTER AND FACE AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE. DR CHOM CLAIMED HE HAD GAINED FOUR KILOS DURING THE SIXTEEN DAYS HE HAS SPENT IN DISTRICT JAIL AND DETENTION CENTER.
FINNEY

UNQUOTE
WHITEHOUSE

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